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ABSTRACT

A program of group psychoeducation and support for single custodial fathers (SCFs) is proposed. Their population in the U.S. grew over 400% between 1970-2000 to over 2 million. The proposed program is unique with special emphasis on SCFs, featuring psychoeducational, supportive and affective components. Areas covered include: special challenges and rewards of single custodial fathering, effective communication, shaping children's behavior, coping with new family arrangements, dealing with feelings, time management, developing a personal plan for future effective fathering, and support. Didactic and affective contents strengthen and broaden participants' skills and emotional repertoires. Take-home work is assigned to broaden group experiences to home settings. A program questionnaire is proposed to assess success and suggest changes. (Author)

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A Group Psychoeducational and Support Program for Single Custodial Fathers

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Abstract

A program of group psychoeducation and support for single custodial fathers (SCFs) is proposed. Their population in the U.S. grew over 400% between 1970-2000 to over 2 million. The proposed program is unique with special emphasis on SCFs, featuring psychoeducational, supportive and affective components. Areas covered include special challenges and rewards of single custodial fathering, effective communication, shaping children's behavior, coping with new family arrangements, dealing with feelings, time management, developing a personal plan for future effective fathering, and support. Didactic and affective contents strengthen and broaden participants' skills and emotional repertoires. Take-home work is assigned to broaden group experiences to home settings. A program questionnaire is proposed to assess success and suggest changes.

Between 1970 and 2000, families with children under 18 headed by single fathers increased by more than 400%, from .39 million to over 2 million. By 2000, single father families accounted for more than 17% of all single parent families and more than 5% of all families with children (Fields & Casper, 2001.) The program currently proposed is unique in its special emphasis on single custodial fathers, featuring psychoeducational, supportive and affective components.

As a complement to the psychoeducational and supportive aspects of the program, development of affective repertoires will be encouraged by introducing feelings-related processing into the program. In particular, a "Father's Song of the Day" with strong affective content relating to fathers will be played and processed from a feelings perspective, early in each group session. This should help set the tone early in each session that sharing of feelings by father participants is acceptable and encouraged. It may be helpful to select currently popular songs that celebrate or make comment on the special roles or challenges of fathers. Some songs from the past that may be illustrative include "Cats in the Cradle" (Chapin & Chapin, 1976, side 3, track 1) and "The Living Years" (Rutherford & Robertson, 1988, track 2).

Method

General

A manual is proposed for presenting a program of group psychoeducation and support for single custodial fathers. It is designed to meet their didactic and affective learning needs. It gives them the opportunity to practice skills and to receive feedback in a supportive environment. It also provides a measure of personal support and socialization with men in similar circumstances.

Participants

The program is designed for single men who have primary custodial responsibilities for children 18 years old or younger. Groups are planned for 8 participants.

Format

A group format is used, with eight weekly sessions planned, lasting 90 minutes each. Instructions are provided to guide the facilitator for each weekly session. Each session includes portions for both supportive activities ("Sharing and Support") and educational activities ("Topic of the Day"). Each session also features the playing of a "Fathers' Song of the Day" to open the Sharing and Support section. This encourages a more affective approach to the groups by opening with a feelings oriented discussion of each father-related song. "Take-Home" assignments are designed to encourage

broadening of the knowledge and experience gained in the sessions to home settings.

Session objectives and opening and closing activities are specified for each session, as are the setting and materials.

Topics

Topics for weekly sessions have been selected to address the key need areas identified above, with both didactic and supportive focuses. Weekly session topics are as follows:

Week 1:	Getting to Know Us (Introductions, overview, group norms).
Week 2:	Special Challenges, Special Strengths, Special Rewards for Single Custodial Fathers.
Week 3:	Effective Communication.
Week 4:	Shaping Children's Behavior.
Week 5:	Family Matters.
Week 6:	Dealing with Feelings.
Week 7:	How Can I Find the Time?
Week 8:	Putting It All Together.

Summary

While previous didactic or support programs have been developed for parents, for fathers, and even for single fathers, none have been found that combined the needed didactic aspects with the also important features of group support and nurturance for single custodial fathers. The topics covered in this eight-week program were selected to address those areas of skill building and emotional support found through research to have particular salience for single custodial fathers. An important feature of this program is the group process, which adds an important level of responsiveness and support not available in strictly didactic programs.

Fathers' Songs of the Day (Examples)

Butterfly Kisses - - Bob Carlisle

Cats in the Cradle - - Harry Chapin

Father of Mine - - Everclear

Father & Son - - Cat Stevens

Leader of the Band - - Dan Fogelberg

The Living Years - - Mike & the Mechanics

Lullabye - - Billy Joel

The Marvelous Toy - - Peter, Paul & Mary

My Father - - Judy Collins

Papa Was a Rollin' Stone - - The Temptations

References

Chapin, H. & Chapin, S. (1976). Cats in the cradle. On Harry Chapin: Greatest stories live (record). Los Angeles: Electra/Asylum/Nonesuch Records. (1975).

Fields, J., & Casper, L.M. (2001). America's families and living arrangements: March 2000. (Current Population Reports No. P20 – 537). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Rutherford, M. & Robertson, B.A. (1988). The living years (Recorded by Mike & the Mechanics). On Living Years (CD). New York: Atlantic Recording.

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